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ABSTRACT

This essay reports on a roundtable of higher education leaders, association heads, government officials, and public policy experts that examined the changes in policymakers' attitudes toward federally sponsored research. Since World War II national science policy has made universities the principal locus of basic research in the United States. But an increasing sense of disjunction between the values of the academy and the dispositions of the federal government reflects changes in a society increasingly skeptical of the claims to special treatment often made by colleges and universities. The intensified pace of the political process has led the federal government to allow markets to replace policy commitments intended to sustain traditional institutions' academic values and processes. It matters less to Washington whether a student spends a Pell Grant attending a for-profit trade school or a traditional institution. This essay argues that for colleges and universities to succeed, they must become mission centered, market smart, and politically savvy: mission centered to find and adhere to central academic values and missions; market smart to promote coherence and cohesion; and politically savvy to understand the changed nature of the political process in which only a limited number of goals can be achieved. (RH)

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PERSPECTIVES

The Knight Higher Education Collaborative
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PERSPECTIVES

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The Third Imperative

As long as most can remember, two icons have symbolized federal policy regarding higher education in the United States. The first is the GI Bill, that extraordinary initiative put forth in the waning moments of the Second World War, which placed a college education, along with access to affordable housing, within the reach of every returning veteran. Never mind that the initiative stemmed more from national concerns about an army of unemployed veterans than from any sense of the efficacy of a college education; never mind either that more than one university president opposed the idea, fearing it would dilute the quality of his institution or diminish the status of the degrees it conferred. The GI Bill helped to make a college education widely available to the middle class, in part by imbedding the conviction that a nation that invests in the college educations of its young is in fact investing in itself.

The second icon that today still frames federal higher education initiatives is Vannevar Bush's articulation in 1947 of a national science policy that made universities the principal locus of basic research in the United States. While the federal government would have responsibility for both setting and funding research priorities, responsibility for getting the job done would be vested in the nation's universities. The U.S. for the most part would eschew independent, government-funded research institutes, centers, and laboratories. Instead, federal research policy would support scientists in their natural work environments, with federal funding, allocated on the principle of academic peer review, helping to identify the best people and most promising work in a given field.

As with the GI Bill, federal research policy and funding came to be seen as serving a variety of purposes and interests. The nation would retain, indeed extend, its scientific advantage, while its universities would prosper, certain that in the federal government they had a supportive funder rather than an active competitor. Federal sponsorship of research would help extend the lines of development begun in the nineteenth century with the Morrill Act and the largely Germanic model of universities organized for the pursuit of research.

While they were not the only instances of the entwining of federal purposes and educational aspirations, these two mid-century rationales—one justifying the financial support of the ambitions of students and communities, the other justifying the federal funding of university-based research—made federal support a defining feature of higher education. Each spoke to and reinforced the notion that the prospects of the American people are tightly interwoven with those of its colleges and universities. The practical corollary of this axiom held that the investment of federal dollars, whether in students or in faculty research, would build a more secure future for the nation and its citizens.

Sometimes without intention, frequently without coordination, and often unaware of all they would spawn, these rationales helped establish a family of federal programs, each with its own momentum, constituencies of interest, and internal bureaucracies.

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Federal programs now provide over $42 billion in financial aid per year to college students, and the new tax credits to college students and their families make the full extent of federal support even greater. The current estimate is that 37 percent of all college students enjoy some financial assistance from the federal government, either in the form of a direct grant, work study grant, and/or a guaranteed or direct student loan. Indeed, a whole industry has grown up around the awarding and processing of federal student financial aid that includes banks; loan guarantee agencies; loan servicers; secondary market providers such as Sallie Mae; the Federal Direct Student Loan Program, which uses federal capital but is run by contractors and higher education institutions; and an ever-expanding set of campus financial aid officers.

What counts more than ever in the minds of most policymakers is the vitality of the market—the ability of educational providers to meet the demands of student customers.

And the beat goes on. From the 105th Congress, which had just concluded as we convened our roundtable, American colleges and universities got just about everything they might reasonably have hoped to get from federal policy. In its reauthorization of the 1965 Higher Education Act, Congress brought the interest rate that borrowers pay on student loans to the lowest level in 17 years. In Fiscal Year 1999, funding for the Pell Grant and Federal Work-Study programs was increased by nearly 5 percent. In funding the administration's program of Hope Scholarships and Lifetime Learning tax credits, Congress and the administration working together provided American higher education what the *Chronicle of Higher Education* frankly labeled a "$40-billion windfall." Few students, institutions, or public officials seeking reelection could claim that their interests had not been served.

Congress has proven no less generous in providing support for basic research, more than half of which goes to university investigators. Funding for basic research increased across all agencies of the federal government by more than 4 percent in both Fiscal Years 1997 and 1998, and it rose a whopping 11 percent in Fiscal Year 1999, to a total of $17.5 billion. Strong bipartisan support in Congress for biomedical research funded through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) was a key factor in these increases. That agency is now on a path of doubling its budget over the course of five years; the FY'99 down payment was nearly $2 billion, of which $1.1 billion was for basic research. Research funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF), the second largest federal supporter of basic research, rose by more than 8 percent to $2.8 billion. Basic research funding at the Department of Energy rose by more than 9 percent to $2.3 billion. Even basic research at the Department of Defense—which had not seen a real increase in funding for six years—was up by 6 percent to $1.1 billion. To be certain, there remain concerns about the larger patterns of the federal research investment; over the past two decades, there has been a significant shift of research and development funds out of the physical sciences, engineering, and social sciences into the life sciences. These concerns notwithstanding, scientific research in general remains a highly visible blip on Washington's radar screen.

This *Policy Perspectives*, however, is concerned not so much with these successes as with the undercurrent of change that has accompanied them. What counts more than ever in the minds of most policymakers is the vitality of the market—the ability of educational providers to meet the demands of student customers. Much the same thinking prevails among those who determine policies regarding federally sponsored research. Federal scientific policy and its funding of individual research grants is now more akin to a procurement process than an investment strategy. What matters are the "deliverables," along with their cost and timeliness. What matters less is the condition of the universities which Vannevar Bush saw, not as suppliers, but as partners needing careful tending.

Indeed, it was this sense of a changed as well as changing political context that primarily shaped the questions we pursued at a special Washington roundtable last year consisting of higher education leaders, association heads, government officials, and public policy experts from throughout the nation. Who was responsible, we asked, and for what? How much had higher education's own behavior accelerated this recasting of the underlying rationales of federal support? Given new political priorities and newly dominant

market forces, what further changes faced American colleges and universities as they sought to ensure their continued vitality? How best could higher education preserve the academic values and processes that are its defining elements in an environment that is less inclined to confer special status to any kind of institution?

A Changing Medium

What has changed most—and what is probably most responsible for the state in which higher education finds itself—is an increasing sense of disjunction between the values of the academy and the dispositions of the federal government. This phenomenon reflects larger changes in society itself, which has come to be increasingly concerned with accountability and outcomes, and increasingly skeptical of the claims to special treatment that colleges and universities often make. To the rest of society, higher education appears in many ways to drag its feet: its costs are high and seemingly beyond its own ability to contain; and all too often it appears to register low on the scales of both productivity and responsiveness. Largely as a result, there is within society in general and among public officials in particular less of a willingness to accord to higher education the discretion of doing things its own way—more of an inclination to decide academic priorities through political means rather than through the mechanisms and values of the academy itself.

Exacerbating the gap between higher education and elected officials is the intensified pace and visibility of the political process, resulting from the increased power of the media not just in Washington but in all of society. Higher education (and every other organized interest) now confronts a political process that is more focused than ever before on short-term readings of public opinion. Positioning and perception mean everything, hence the rise of event-driven campaigns focused on the media to promote ideas as well as candidates and parties. Politics has taken on a commercial gloss, reflecting the use of corporate marketing techniques such as focus groups and polling to decide which positions and policy choices offer the greatest short-term advantage. The expense of such techniques helps to explain the constant search for cash in what have become "permanent campaigns." In the age of term limits and media scrutiny, the pressure on legislators to satisfy the home constituency is more intense than ever.

In this changing political climate American colleges and universities are not without advantage. Higher education is politically a big-ticket item—employing lots of people, benefiting literally thousands of communities and millions of students and their families. Voters care about it—in large part because today getting ahead means going to college. As a result, higher education has become more important politically, though in ways and for reasons that have made those responsible for the nation's colleges and universities increasingly uncomfortable.

The accelerating march of capital and programmatic initiatives exempt from peer review is one example of how these changing circumstances lead to a different, more blatantly political process of educational policy and choice. While there is certainly nothing new in elected officials allotting Congressional pork, the growing phenomenon of legislative earmarks to specific institutions bespeaks an environment in which politics themselves are coming to play an increasing role in the allocation of funding to higher education institutions. Legislative earmarks to such institutions in this year's federal budget amounted to a record $797 million—a figure that reflects the intensity of individual institutions' lobbying efforts no less than the desire of legislators to please their own districts. For the sponsoring member of the House or Senate, the prize consists in having a facility built or a program funded in one's own district or state. It is about jobs and prestige as political office-holders seek to leverage the substantial impact that a university or college has on a regional economy. For the benefiting college or university it becomes a chance to win the prize that might otherwise slip away through peer review—a chance ultimately worth the jealousy and scorn of peer institutions.

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Until now, the two federal agencies whose legislative appropriations have not become tainted with earmarks are the NIH and NSF. There are many who worry, however, that it is only a matter of time before appropriations to these agencies will bear the all-too-familiar imprint of legislative earmarks. The fear is that what happened last year to the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), will eventually happen to the NIH and NSF. In FIPSE's case it was a matter of a federal agency bowing to Congressional demands and canceling a $9.5 million grants program that had already received some 1,700 proposals for peer review. The new program replacing the earlier competition for the most part preserved the principle of peer review, although in a mix of Congressionally mandated and FIPSE-selected categories. The lasting impression is of a Congress more than willing to impose its own categories and selection criteria on the process—and presumably to increase the likelihood of benefiting particular constituents—even if that means overriding the judgments of experts in a field.

The 1990s mark the moment when higher education's federal support came fully to reflect the public's reliance on the workings of the market to shape its choices.

In the realm of student financial aid, the same story is reflected in the emergence of the Hope Scholarship and Lifetime Learning tax credits as the principal vehicles for increasing the federal government's expenditures in support of undergraduate education. For three decades, most of higher education had argued for the targeted support of students with substantial financial need, coupled with a sustained concern about the underrepresentation of people of color among those attending a college or university. The Hope Scholarship changed all that. Suddenly—or perhaps not so suddenly—the focus shifted from the student to the parent, to those who paid the bills and were more likely to vote in the next election. The benefit being offered was as targeted as it was immediate: a reduction in taxes for those middle-income families with children in college, to the tune of $40 billion over the course of five years. The Hope Scholarship and Lifetime Learning tax credits confirmed that regardless of which party controls Congress, it is the middle class as much as historically underserved populations that are to benefit from federal student aid investments.

The Vagaries of the Market

Accompanying the rise of political manipulation has been the increasing role of market forces in shaping public choices. Nowhere has this ascendancy been more apparent than in the power of the market to distribute students and hence funds among institutions of higher education. In part the market triumphed because cash-strapped states in the early 1990s forced public institutions to rely ever more heavily on tuition income as opposed to appropriated revenue. Under the guise of financial necessity and the sense that most public institutions could survive with less public subsidy, federal and state policymakers came to regard a college education less as a public investment in an educated and skilled citizenry, and more as a consumer good of principal benefit to the student. Again, it was a change that, willy-nilly, colleges and universities accelerated as they pursued competitive advantage through aggressive marketing.

The market for sponsored research evolved in much the same way. The constant need to win new funds and the changing context for accomplishing this task have taught the nation's very best universities the importance of harnessing the energies of their most entrepreneurial faculty, encouraging them to establish research centers and institutes whose principal if not sole business would be to win research grants and contracts from both the federal government and an expanding list of major corporate and foundation sponsors eager to develop and test new ideas and products. Not surprisingly, those federal agencies responsible for awarding the bulk of the grants and contracts that supported these institutes and centers began to treat the universities that housed them as they would any supplier from whom the government wanted its money's worth.

Through the Looking Glass

No, it's not business as usual. There are different issues and voices, altered concerns, changing

derive from their core values, as well as from an understanding of their real strengths and capacities.

Institutions need to make educational results the defining element of their programs. Given the disposition — in Washington, in state capitals, and in the public mind — that stresses accountability above virtually all other objectives, no institution can ignore the need to develop a culture of positive results. It is in the interest of every university or college, for example, to ensure that its students' undergraduate learning experiences are characterized by rigor and coherence not just in the major but in its program of general education. Even more particularly, no institution can neglect the task of ensuring that its future K-12 teachers receive substantive grounding from their baccalaureate educations to become both knowledgeable and effective in their primary and secondary school classrooms.

The Third Imperative

Previous *Policy Perspectives* have argued that for colleges and universities to succeed they must become both mission centered and market smart. To this we would now add a third imperative. For higher education to sustain public support it must become politically savvy as well.

What does it mean in the coming years for higher education to be politically savvy? In part, it means accepting the fact that governments are more willing than ever to let market forces and short-term political opportunism shape public choice. In part it means understanding how a change in societal values and market functions has recast both the context and the mode of political exchange. It means that colleges and universities must find new ways to convey their collective purpose and value to the public in general — and to Washington in particular. In many ways, higher education has reached a point at which it can no longer expect the public or its political leadership to be particularly moved by the fact that its mission is to educate and conduct research. Simply to satisfy their markets, most colleges and universities will have to demonstrate the impact they have on their graduates. At the same time, those institutions interested in or dependent on government funding will have to learn better how to mobilize the rhythms of contemporary politics for the deeper, perhaps even subversive, purpose of fostering a lasting public understanding of the societal values that universities and colleges supply the nation.

Higher education's experience of Washington politics through the 1990s has taught American colleges and universities a set of expensive lessons. The first is that higher education needs to choose carefully the issues it brings to the political arena. A complex array of issues and needs is not likely to leave a lasting impression in a field where flashes and sound bites clamor for public attention. Higher education needs to delineate its upper- from its lower-case objectives, focusing its agenda on those matters that have greatest importance and the potential for greatest societal benefit — and leaving other items to find funding in other arenas. The difficulty of doing so stems from the fact that higher education is a very large and diffuse industry; the greater the range of missions it embraces and populations it serves, the greater the difficulty of speaking in a single voice to which Washington and the media-minded public might best respond. Out of necessity, higher education must learn to choose its targets more carefully, gauging better that which is possible as opposed to that which, despite its ideological appeal, has become quixotic. There have to be fewer litmus tests, less emphasis on absolutes in general and political ideologies in particular. Higher education will have to learn that the public sees teaching and research as separate activities that more often than not compete for scarce resources in both the marketplace and the political arena.

The second lesson is the need to communicate that agenda in terms that have currency in an image-driven environment. In many ways, Washington appears to have lost connection with the values and commitments that were the underpinnings of the nation's substantial investment in higher education at mid-century. Reestablishing that connection will require that higher education understand the environment that any interest group accepts as the current playing field in contemporary Washington. A cynical view of this field might suggest that any astute institution should immediately retain the services of a K Street firm to make sure it wins its own share of pork. To the extent that traditional higher education institutions remain content that intensive lobbying in pursuit of their individual interests is the answer, however, they become part of the problem, and they contribute to the perception that higher education is, after all, no

more highly principled than any other industry seeking to advance its fortunes.

A fundamental challenge to higher education institutions will be to explain their values and purposes in terms that resonate in today's society and among its political leadership. Any effort to reacquaint the public with the values that underlie traditional colleges and universities is necessarily an act of education; as such, it calls upon the members of academic communities to apply the very skills they have developed as teachers of students. As one faculty member has observed, "Working with those who lobby for universities, I'm struck by the fact that what they say to us is almost identical to what I tell beginning graduate students about how to teach. The basics are the same: determining what different individuals know about a subject initially, explaining things at a level that they can understand, and presenting ideas in terms of issues that are important to them." Universities and colleges must realize the extent to which their scrambling to feed at the trough of Congressional pork compromises the very premises on which the nation's commitment to higher education has been fulfilled. What is needed is a "lobbying" effort on behalf of all higher education institutions to renew the national awareness of their important contributions to society as not-for-profit institutions concerned with both education and the creation of new knowledge. Higher education institutions do far more

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to advance their cause in the public arena when they work collectively than they accomplish through individual appeals; our hope is that higher education's associations will play an increasingly important role in forging that unified voice and appeal.

Finally, when responding to changed circumstances in Washington, colleges and universities must resist the temptation to suppose that, by their very nature, they will receive special regard and treatment either by the public or by governmental agencies. To suppose that the federal government or any other interest will hold higher education in abeyance from market forces on the basis of recent memory or longer tradition is to turn a blind eye to the reality of contemporary politics.

The irony, perhaps, is that the resolution of those tensions lies in having colleges and universities, both singularly and collectively, reaffirm higher education's historic sense of having a special calling with a coherent set of concerns and goals. The market has

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already introduced too much fragmentation into the process, substituting short-term success for longer-term values and commitments. In the lingo of the modern political campaign, higher education will have to first develop and then learn to stay on message. To the question, "What's the mission?" there needs to be a compelling answer other than "All things to all people." In those areas where higher education claims to deserve some insulation from or correction of market forces, the argument must be grounded in a disciplined and empirically supported case that the unaided market will lead society astray. The case cannot be based on vague claims of virtue or intellectual superiority or historical privilege.

Being mission centered means finding and keeping that central weight of academic values and missions. Being market smart entails using the nature and forces of the market to promote coherence and cohesion. Being politically savvy means understanding the changed nature of a political process in which only a limited number of goals can be achieved, and even then for only a limited time -- that there is no forever, however compelling the argument or virtuous its claimants may be.

tion have constituted an act of trust in the ability of these institutions to help fulfill societal objectives through their own processes, in accordance with their own academic values. What has eroded since mid-century is that foundation of trust, due in part to changes in societal values, in part to changes in the political process, and in part to the behavior of institutions themselves.

The worst outcome of all would be for traditional institutions of higher education to continue with business as usual in the face of this changing environment. It is toward the aversion of that end that we offer the following broad recommendations — some directed to the framers of both federal and state policies, and some to the nation's institutions of higher education.

Universities and colleges must understand the degree to which the federal government has allowed markets to replace explicit policy commitments intended to sustain traditional institutions, their academic values, and processes. Institutions that embrace missions of contributing to the public good through an array of programs — including programs that, strictly speaking, cost more than they contribute to an institution's finances — must understand that the federal government makes less and less of a distinction between them and for-profit enterprises that are motivated primarily by the opportunities that higher education markets provide. What matters is that the student is well served, not who does the serving. Over the past decade the federal government has grown increasingly satisfied that vigorous market competition is synonymous with the attainment of the public good. It matters less and less to Washington whether a student spends a Pell Grant attending a for-profit trade school or a traditionally configured institution. And the widespread increase in federal earmarking suggests that it is an open question in Washington whether a limited number of major research universities should remain the locus of the nation's basic research as determined by academic peer review. For higher education institutions to continue under the assumption that either federal or state policies will somehow shield them from the teeth of market competition is to invite disaster.

Both public and institutional policies need to focus particular attention on when the market fails to yield effective public choice. If the increased power of markets has helped the nation to achieve some aspects of the public good more expeditiously, experience has also taught that markets alone do not accomplish all societal objectives. Federal and state governments as well as universities and colleges need deliberate policies to keep access and equity on the public agenda. In the most general sense, public policy and higher education institutions must work to ensure that financial need continues to be a central criterion in the allocation of student financial aid. The steady extension of "need" to include more members of the middle class effectively reduces the societal commitment to make a higher education accessible to those for whom the financial hurdle is most formidable.

Higher education institutions and policymakers must work to ensure that academic peer review continues to be the principal method for allocating federal financial support of university-based research. The movement in Congress to award sponsored research contracts on the basis of "research equity" threatens to undermine both the quality and the impact of scientific, medical, and educational research. Transforming the national government's investment in research into a public works program to benefit regional economies can only diminish the quality of research conducted in university settings. For their part, research universities must focus on the quality and utility of research conducted under their auspices; if peer review is to hold its ground against political influence, research universities must be able to demonstrate that research funded on the basis of peer review in fact sets the standard for quality.

Institutions need to define and adhere to their missions. Colleges and universities must resist the desire to pursue every new opportunity that presents itself as new markets evolve to serve societal needs. In considering its options for developing new educational and research programs, an institution must be certain that the requirements for successful competition in a given field match the skills of its faculty and staff. It may seem perfectly obvious to state that institutional mission should determine which new opportunities a college or university chooses to pursue. But too many institutions have inverted the syntax of that statement, distorting their missions beyond recognition in pursuit of unfocused and even disparate ambitions. This lack of definition harms individual institutions and contributes to the larger sense that higher education has not defined its priorities as sharply as it could. The point is not that institutions should remain static but that their decisions for new programmatic development should

rhythms. The 1990s mark the moment when higher education's federal support came fully to reflect the public's reliance on the workings of the market to shape its choices. The standard issues of access and quality on the one hand and peer review on the other had come to have far less purchase than before. Higher education preserved its federal funding largely because those responsible for protecting the industry's interest understood just how much the game had changed. Out of necessity, the academy's associations — or at least their Washington arms — learned to apply the leverage accruing from the economic benefit that colleges and universities confer to every Congressional district in America.

One of the most important lessons brought back from the legislative battlefield is simply that official Washington is all but vendor neutral.

One of the most important lessons brought back from the legislative battlefield is simply that official Washington is all but vendor neutral. While it remains mindful of the unscrupulous practices of proprietary institutions a decade ago, the federal government is increasingly disposed to consider for-profit and traditional institutions as interchangeable currency. What matters are the services delivered, be they educational or research, and not who delivers them. It is an attitude one finds increasingly in state capitols as well. Roy Romer, former Governor of Colorado and former Chair of the Education Commission of the States, would regularly tease higher education audiences by claiming he was ready to take the money his state spent on its colleges and universities and see if some provider like the University of Phoenix wouldn't give him a better deal — less talk about educational process, more promise about immediate outcomes, and a greater willingness, even eagerness, to talk frankly about what things actually cost.

One result of this disposition among policymakers is that the University of Phoenix, the postsecondary education ventures of Michael Milken, and other for-profit interests are gaining headway into student markets that universities and colleges had for the most part claimed as their own. These for-profit players have understood that the federal government's student financial aid programs constitute a substantial revenue stream — and that any organization that captures part of that student market can turn a significant profit if it also succeeds in containing its instructional costs.

The problem is that too often traditional higher education has carried on business as usual without understanding the impact its new competitors have already had. Being purely market-driven, for-profit education targets only those parts of the postsecondary education market that offer the promise of greatest financial return. Moreover, these institutions compete with traditional colleges and universities not so much on the basis of price as on convenience, service, and even the quality of teaching. Lacking the patina of a traditional campus, for-profit institutions know that they must rise or fall on their ability to serve effectively the needs of the market. Accordingly, they exhibit a greater willingness to teach at times and places that meet the needs of working adults; and because their instructors are paid and evaluated on the basis of teaching effectiveness, the quality of instruction is often superior to that of traditional institutions, which reward faculty for an array of activities in addition to teaching.

Traditional institutions of higher education could find themselves in a situation like the nation's railroads in the early twentieth century: those enterprises considered themselves in the railroad business, though they were in fact only one of several contenders for the nation's transportation business. As for-profit providers of postsecondary education come to gain greater societal acceptance and even regional accreditation, they become enterprises poised to capture an ever-larger share of the student markets in many fields seeking both baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate degrees. What will force higher education to

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change is increased competition for the dollars that the federal, state, and local governments make available through their programs of student financial aid, sponsored research, and service purchase.

Up for Grabs

Probably the most lasting as well as troubling effect of this increasing reliance on the market to distribute students and resources among institutions is the erosion of guiding purpose in institutions themselves. The lines of demarcation that once distinguished colleges and universities from one another are becoming increasingly blurred, as differences that had once defined institutions become all but irrelevant. In many cases, the markets for both research and students can lead an institution into impulsive, even contradictory ventures, putting institutional purpose up for grabs.

Every institution needs the ability to innovate and evolve within the guiding frame of its mission. In seeking out new sources of revenue and vitality, however, there is a strong temptation for an institution to divert its energies away from its core strengths toward ventures that are, strictly speaking, beyond its capacity. Some are drawn to the dazzling light of opportunity that markets for sponsored research seem to offer. The push within such institutions is to strengthen graduate programs, develop research capacity, and make research and publication more central to value and reward systems—regardless of how well these ambitions fit the institution's mission, its financial resources, or the students it serves. Other institutions distort their purpose in the pursuit of new student markets, developing new programs more in the hope of revenue enhancement than from any deeper conviction about the contribution these programs would make to an institution's educational offerings.

Lacking a sense of unified mission, no longer certain of where their real strengths lie, such institutions often find themselves consumed with internal discord about their central purpose. Focus groups conducted recently by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement reveal that the absence of clear direction often stems from a lack of communication and trust between the faculty and the chief executive or academic officer. Often, these feelings result in prolonged contention that detracts from the institution's ability to move purposefully in any direction. Having lost sight of the bearings that had earlier guided them, many institutions find themselves at a loss for how to resume course.

Continued Traction

As they consider how best to maintain political traction within an altered landscape, colleges and universities might consider the evolution of the school lunch program. Begun in the 1940s to help ensure that a substantial number of young people would prove healthy and fit for military service, over time the purpose of the school lunch program came to be defined in terms of ensuring that some portion of young learners' diets included key nutritional elements conducive to physical development and effective learning. The challenge to higher education is to maintain traction in a similar sense—to ensure that the capacities and strengths it has to offer will prove to be a source of continued societal benefit, even as society's needs evolve.

One of the miracles of federal policy was that it produced in almost the same historical moment two sets of guiding principles and financial commitments that would make possible the major achievements of American higher education through the last half of the twentieth century. More than any other factor, it was the federal government's commitment to make higher education accessible to an extended range of citizens, coupled with its commitment to make the nation's universities and their faculties the drivers of scientific research, that produced the spectrum of today's American universities and colleges—a set of institutions that remains the undisputed world leader, both in the quality of education and research and in the opportunities for individual advancement it provides to a full range of citizens, regardless of background or economic circumstance. The federal policies that made possible this array of institutions had their impetus in part from concerns to ensure that Americans had real opportunities to become contributing members of society, and in part from concerns about the nation's ability to maintain its lead in scientific knowledge and development in the years following the Second World War.

Colleges and universities must understand that changes have occurred in the mindset that gave rise to these policy commitments and their accompanying investments in higher education. In many ways the federal and state investments supporting higher educa-

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